



## The Staked Plains

**Stefan Kiesbye**

Saddle Road Press (Nov 24, 2015)

Softcover \$15.00 (170pp)

978-0-9913952-7-9

*This unflinching novel focuses on a sometime psychic who is forced to make difficult choices in her declining New Mexico hometown.*

In *The Staked Plains*, Stefan Kiesbye portrays life in a declining New Mexican town through the eyes of a sometime psychic. Told in spare prose, daily interactions with advice-seeking clients intertwine with the town's struggles until events escalate beyond anyone's imagining.

Married to a professor who works at the nearby university, Jenny Preston enjoys a content life in the quiet town of Querosa, New Mexico. To pass the time, she tells fortunes by reading her clients' bare feet. While the town's residents hardly consider her abilities respectable, people continue to seek out her help. But as people grow more dependent on Jenny's skills, her life takes an unexpected turn, forcing her to make a decision between what she currently has, what she can have, and what she ultimately wants.

Beyond the shifts that send Jenny's life off course, *The Staked Plains* presents a town facing dire circumstances in unflinching detail. Not only does Querosa suffer from a long-term drought, its residents see no future within the town's limits. Developers want to obtain the land through whatever means necessary. The story hints at an ominous future where those lower on the socioeconomic hierarchy find themselves at the mercy of those with more clout.

Even Jenny's persistent longing for something more mirrors the town's plight. But as she learns with heartbreaking clarity, the things we most want sometimes remain beyond our reach. Jenny treads carefully around the implications of her psychic abilities, fearing the responsibility of controlling someone's destiny. Ultimately, this trepidation proves prescient, as her own fate also remains out of her control.

Although *The Staked Plains* takes place in a small, unassuming town, its narrative pushes beyond its defined borders. An introspective narrative from the perspective of a woman who survives on her peers' forbearance, it depicts the deterioration of both its narrator and the town she calls home. And in the end, it reminds all of us that we can never shirk ultimate responsibility for our choices and actions.

VERNIEDA VERGARA (Spring 2016)

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